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## **Congress of the United States** **House of Representatives**

September 21, 2010

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I'm writing to thank you for your continuing attention to the priorities of rural states like South Dakota, including strengthening the agricultural economy and supporting biofuels, and to ask for your assistance on another important issue facing rural areas in the Western U.S. -- combating the growing mountain pine beetle epidemic. Specifically, I'm writing to request that the department exercise the authority it has to provide emergency funding to combat the mountain pine beetle infestation in the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF).

In December 2009, I led a bipartisan effort in the House with Representative Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming to oppose proposals to transfer and reprogram funds from the Black Hills National Forest and other forests in the Rocky Mountain Region because I believed that funding was needed in South Dakota to increase mountain pine beetle mitigation activities. I'm glad that the proposal to transfer funds out of our region never gained traction, and that ultimately the Administration provided an additional \$2 million to the BHNF during Fiscal Year 2010, which allowed the U.S. Forest Service to perform increased thinning treatments to combat the mountain pine beetle emergency. Deputy Undersecretary Jay Jensen also visited the BHNF in August to tour areas of the forest that have been impacted by mountain pine beetles and to meet with affected local stakeholders. Both of these actions acknowledge the severity of mountain pine beetle challenge in the BHNF and indicate an appreciation for the threat posed by the mountain pine beetle to economic development in rural communities in our region.

As you know, despite Forest Service action, the current outbreaks of mountain pine beetles continue to pose great threats to the BHNF. These outbreaks are the largest and most intense in recorded history, affecting an estimated 356,000 acres of ponderosa pine in the last 13 years. The spread of the epidemic is now accelerating at a dangerous pace, with beetle infested trees showing up in new areas throughout the forest. This epidemic has created the potential for catastrophic fires that threaten communities, forests, watersheds, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and local tourism industries. For instance, the Mt. Rushmore National Monument recently announced that, for the second year in a row, the traditional Independence Day

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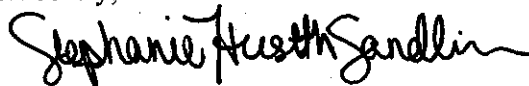
fireworks celebration will not be held because of concern about wildfire danger caused by nearby trees that have been killed by mountain pine beetles.

As you know, the Forest Service doesn't fight fire emergencies with funds allocated for annual operations, and therefore should not be expected to fund the response to the bark beetles using operating funds, particularly when such action could decrease the resources available for a variety of programs designed to keep forests healthy.

As you know, the emergency authority in the Fiscal Year 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Bill authorizes the Secretary to provide funding to USDA agencies for the "arrest and eradication of contagious or infectious diseases or pests of animals, poultry, or plants." Earlier this year, the department exercised this emergency authority and provided funding to address outbreaks of Asian longhorned beetles. I believe the scope and intensity of the mountain pine beetle epidemic in the Black Hills is likewise the kind of emergency situation for which the department's emergency response authority was designed by Congress. Emergency funding would provide the Forest Service with additional support, on top of the measures it is already taking, to perform thinning in areas vulnerable to mountain pine beetles and sanitation treatments to remove "fresh hit" trees before the beetles spread to even more areas next summer. I therefore respectfully request additional emergency resources for the Forest Service to combat the mountain pine beetles in the Black Hills National Forest.

If you have questions or require more information, please contact Jon Loevner in my office at 202-225-2801 or [Jon.Loevner@mail.house.gov](mailto:Jon.Loevner@mail.house.gov). Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request and for your continued focus on the needs of rural states like South Dakota.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephanie Herseth Sandlin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Stephanie" being the most prominent.

Stephanie Herseth Sandlin  
Member of Congress